

Al-Mizān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

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Verses 1-5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝

- (1:1) *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.*
(1:2) *All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*
(1:3) *The Beneficent the Merciful.*
(1:4) *The Master of the Day of Judgment.*
(1:5) *Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help.*

Commentary

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
(1:1) *In (bi) the name of Allah, the Beneficent (al-Rahmān), the Merciful (al-Rahīm).*

People often take the name of one of their great and powerful personalities at the time of doing or beginning a work. By this association, it is believed, the work would achieve success, greatness and blessings; or that it would be a memorial to keep the named one's memory alive forever. This is also observed in naming a child, a project, a house or an association—they give it the name of a deeply loved or highly respected person, so that his name would continue in this form; for example, a man names his son after his father, in order to perpetuate the father's memory.

This verse runs on the same line. God began His speech with His Own name—Great is His name—so that the ideas taught in this chapter be stamped by, and associated with it. Also, it teaches a lesson to mankind, showing them the perfect manner of starting all their talks and actions; it guides them to put the stamp of the divine name on all their activities; doing every work for the sake of God, associating it with His good names and attributes. In this way that action would neither be rendered null and void, nor remain incomplete; it has been started in the name of God, and

negation and annihilation cannot reach that sacred name.

God has declared variously in the Qur'an that what is not for His Person must perish, is in vain; He will proceed to the deeds not done for His sake and shall render them as scattered floating dust; He shall forfeit what they have done and shall nullify their deeds; and that nothing shall remain except His honored Person.

Therefore, what is done for the sake of God and performed in His name, shall continue and will not perish. Everything, every work and every affair shall have its share of eternity—as much as it is related to God. It is this reality that has been hinted at in the universally accepted tradition of the Prophet: "Every important affair, not begun with the name of God, shall remain incomplete ..." The word *al-abtar* (translated here as "incomplete") means a thing whose end is cut off, an animal whose tail is severed.

The preposition *bi* (in, with), in the phrase "In the name of God," is related to an implied verb, "I begin." This verse, at this particular place, begins the speech which is a single action; this singleness comes from the singleness of its meaning; that is, the meaning intended to be conveyed, the aim and purpose of the speech.

God has mentioned the purpose for which His speech—the whole Qur'an—has been revealed: ...*indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety ...* (5:15-16). There are other verses which show that the aim with which the Book—the speech of God—has been sent down is the guidance of the people.

Therefore, the full import of the sentence would be as follows: The guidance, total guidance is begun with the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful; He is God, Whom the servants return to; He is Beneficent, Who has opened the way of His All-encompassing mercy for believers and disbelievers alike, the mercy which provides them with all that is necessary and good for their existence and life; He is Merciful, Who has reserved His special mercy for the believers, the mercy which ensures their happiness in the life hereafter and their nearness to their Lord. God has said: ... *and My mercy encompasses all things; so I will ordain it [specially] for those who guard [against evil] and pay zakāt, and those who believe in our signs* (7:156). This explanation has been written, putting this verse in the framework of the whole Qur'an, of which it is the first sentence.

Again, God has repeatedly mentioned "chapter" (*sūrah*) in His speech.

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For example: *Say: Then bring a chapter like this ...* (10:38); *Say: Then bring ten chapters like it, forged ...* (11:13); *And whenever a chapter is revealed ...* (9:86); *[This is] a chapter which We have revealed ...* (24:1). It shows that God Himself has divided His speech in various parts, each part being called a chapter. It naturally means that every chapter is a single unit in structure and in fullness of meaning; and that unity is not found between various verses of a chapter or between one chapter and the other. It necessarily follows that the theme of every chapter is different from the other; every chapter is revealed with a certain aim in view, and when that aim is achieved the chapter comes to its end.

Therefore, the verse, “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful” coming at the beginning of every chapter, refers to the particular theme of that chapter.

Accordingly, this verse, at the beginning of this chapter of “The Opening,” refers also to the theme of this chapter. It appears from its semantic flow that its purpose is to praise God and to pledge the believer’s servitude (declaring that he worships only God and seeks help from Him only) and then to pray for divine guidance. This speech has been uttered by God, on behalf of His servant, so that the servant may learn how, by repeating these words, he may show his gratitude to, and servitude before, God.

This pledging of servitude is the important work which the servant of God intends to do; and which he begins in the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. In this context, this verse would mean: In Thy name, I pledge my servitude to Thee.

In this first verse of this chapter, therefore, the preposition, “in,” is related to the implied verb, “I begin”; and the aim is to perfect the sincere servitude by addressing the pledge to God Himself. Some people have said that the implied verb is “I seek help” (by); although this view is not objectionable, but “I begin” is more appropriate—the chapter explicitly seeks divine help, “and Thee do we beseech for help”; therefore, it is not necessary in the beginning.

al-Ism (name) is the word that points to the named thing or person. It is derived from *al-simah* (sign, identifying mark) or *al-sumuww* (height, eminence). In any case, it is the word by which an individual thing or person is spoken of or spoken to. Naturally, it is other than, and separate from, the named thing.

The following is a sample of the academic exercises so much loved by the ancients:

There is a name that means “the person himself seen in the light of an attribute”; such a name is not separate from the named person; it is the person himself. The word *al-ʿĀlim* (The Knower), one of the divine names, points to the Person of God as seen in the light of His attribute of Knowledge. At the same time, it refers to God Who cannot be known except by one or the other of His attributes. Let us explain this matter in another way: “Name” points to the named person; likewise the personal traits and characteristics point to the holder of those traits and characteristics—in this way, we may say that the personal traits are the “names” of the person concerned. “Name,” accordingly, can be of two kinds: in words, and in substance. The direct name is of the second type, that is, the personal trait that points to its own subjects—for example, the “Knowledge” that points to God, the holder of the knowledge. And the word “the Knower” is in reality an indirect name—it points to the direct name, that is, the attribute of knowledge, which in its turn directly points to its holder, that is, God. “Knowledge” is, thus, the name of God, and “the Knower” is “the name of the name.”

The above was the result of the academic analysis (or should we say, mental luxury!) mentioned earlier; but such things should not be imposed on language and literature. “Name,” according to the “plain Arabic language,” means what we have written earlier. There was a lot of controversy going on among the theologians of the early centuries of Islam: whether the name was separate from the named person or not. Such unnecessary polemics is out of place at present times; it is self-evident that “name” and “named” are two things, and not one. We should not waste time and energy in quoting the ancients’ arguments and counter-arguments, and in judging who was right.

Allāh (the divine name) was originally *al-Ilāh*; the “I” in the middle was omitted because of frequent use. *al-Ilāh* is derived from *alaha* (he worshiped) or from *aliha* or *waliha* (he was bewildered). It is on paradigm of *al-fiʿāl* in meaning of *al-mafʿūl* (object-noun); for example, *al-kitāb* means *al-maktūb* (the written); likewise *al-Ilāh* means *al-Maʿlūh*, the One who is worshiped, or the One about whom minds are bewildered.

Quite clearly, it has become the proper name of God. It was commonly used in this meaning in Arabic long before the Qur’an was revealed. The

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fact that even pre-Islamic Arabs used this name for God, may be inferred from the following verses: *And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: Allah... (43:87) ... and they say: This for Allah—so they assert—and this is for our associates... (6:136).*

Other divine names may be used as adjectives for this name; for example, “the Beneficent and the Merciful God”; also, this name is used as subject of the verbs derived from other divine names; for example, “God knew,” “God had mercy,” “God gave sustenance” and so on. But the word, “God,” is never used as adjective to any other name, nor is the verb derived from it used to describe other names. It is a clear proof that it is the proper name of God.

The divine existence, inasmuch as God is the God of everything, presupposes that He should have all the attributes of perfection; and, as a result, this name points to all perfect attributes. That is why it is said that the name, “God,” means “the Person Who is the Essential Being, and Who encompasses all the attributes of perfection.” But the fact is that it is the proper name of God and no other meaning (except that related to worship or bewilderment) has been taken into consideration here.

al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm (The Beneficent, the Merciful) are two adjectives derived from *al-raḥmah* (mercy).

When you see someone suffering from a deficiency which he cannot remove by himself, the reaction which you experience and which tells you to provide him with what he needs in order to make up his deficiency, is called mercy. Ultimately, mercy means giving and bestowing to fulfill others need. It is this latter meaning in which this attribute is used for God.

al-Raḥmān is on a paradigm which is used for magnification and exaggeration. *al-Raḥīm* is a paradigm of *al-Sifāt al-mushabbahah* (perpetual adjective, inseparable attribute). Therefore, *al-Raḥmān* (translated here as “the Beneficent”) relates to that all-encompassing mercy that is bestowed upon the believers and the unbelievers alike. It is used in the Qur’an, mostly in this meaning. God says: *The Beneficent [Allah] is firm in power (20:5); Say: As for him who remains in error, the Beneficent [Allah] will surely prolong his length of days... (19:75).* *al-Raḥīm* (translated here as “the Merciful”), on the other hand, is more appropriate for that mercy which shall remain forever, the perpetual inexhaustible mercy that shall be bestowed on the believers in the life hereafter. God says: *... and He is Merciful to the believers (33:43); surely to them (that is, the believers) He*

is Compassionate, Merciful (9:117). That is why it is said that the mercy of *al-Rahmān* is common for the believers and the unbelievers, and that of *al-Rahīm* is reserved for the believers.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

(1:2) *All praise (al-ḥamd) is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*

It has been said that *al-ḥamd* is to praise someone for a good acquired by his own intention, *al-madh* (also translated as praise) is more general—it is used to praise even that good which someone is given without his will and power. If you praise someone for his benevolence, you may use either word—*al-ḥamd* or *al-madh* but if you want to praise a pearl for its luster, you may use the verb *al-madh*, but not *al-ḥamd* because the pearl has not acquired that luster by its own will and power. *al* (translated here as “all”) in *al-ḥamd* denotes either species or praise, or each and every praise. The end result is the same in either case; that is why it has been translated here as “all.” God says: *That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of everything* (40:62). Whatever is there, is created by God. Again He says: ... *Who made good everything that He has created* (32: 7). Everything is good because it has been created by God and is attributed to Him. In other words, a thing becomes good because it is created by God; and everything created by Him is good. Every creature is good and beautiful because God has made it so; and every good and beautiful thing is created by God, attributed to Him.

God says: *He is Allah, the One, the Subduer [of all]* (39:4); *And the faces are humbled before the Living, the Self-subsistent Allah ...* (20:111). In other words, He has created the creatures by His own knowledge, power and will, and not because He was compelled by someone else to do so. Therefore, everything is His own good work, done by His own will.

The above discourse was about God's action. Coming to His names, He has said: *Allah is He besides Whom there is no Allah; His are the very best names* (20:8); *And Allah's are the best names; therefore call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names* (7:180). It is clear that God is good in His names and good in His actions; and that every good and beauty emanates from Him.

Therefore, God is praised for His good names as He is praised for His good actions. Every praise, uttered by any speaker for any good deed is in reality addressed to God only; because every good (which is the object of praise) emanates from Him only. In short, to Him belong the species

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of the praise and all and every praise.

The verse: “Thee do we worship,” shows that the whole chapter is revealed on behalf of man. God teaches him in this chapter how to praise his Lord and how to show his allegiance to, and humility toward, Him. And the phrase, “All praise is due to God,” further strengthens this inference, as will be seen in the next paragraph.

The praise means to attribute, to ascribe; and God has declared that He is above all that His servants ascribe to Him. He has said: *Hallowed be Allah (for freedom) from what they ascribe, except the servants of Allah, freed (from sins) (37:159-160)*. This declaration is general and unconditional; and it is further proved by the fact that not a single verse in the Qur’an ascribes the action of “praise” to anyone except God and some of the prophets (who were doubtlessly freed from sins). God addresses Noah (Nūh) in these words: ... *Say: All praise is due to Allah who delivered us from the unjust people (23:28)*. And He quotes Abraham (Ibrāhīm) as saying: *Praise be to Allah, Who gave me in old age Ishmael and Isaac ... (14:39)*. Also, He told His Prophet, Muḥammad, in several places, *And say: Praise be to Allah ... (27:93)*. Further, he says about David and Solomon (peace be on both of them): ... *and they both said: Praise be to Allah ... (27:15)*. Another exception is of the people of the Paradise—and they also are freed from spite and rancor as well as from vain and sinful words: ... *and the last of their cry shall be: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds (10:10)*.

As for other creatures, the Qur’an never says that they “praise” God—they always “glorify God with His praise.” God says: ... *and the angels declare His glory with the praise of their Lord ... (42:5)*; *and the thunder declares His glory with His praise ... (13:13)*; *and there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise ... (17:44)*. In all these verses “praise” is preceded by glorifying; rather “glorifying” is the main verb and “with praise” is only a clause, attached to it. None except God may comprehend the beauty and perfection of His work, nor can anyone else understand the beauty and perfection of His names and attributes. God says: ... *they do not comprehend Him in knowledge ... (20:110)*. In this background, if they were to praise Him it would mean that they had comprehended Him in their knowledge; in other words, God would be surrounded by their limited understanding, confined within the boundary of their comprehension. Therefore, they were careful enough to first declare His glory from all the limits of their comprehension, before starting His praise. God says:

... surely Allah knows and you do not know (16:74).

So far as His purified servants are concerned, He treats their utterance of praise as though He Himself has said it, because they are free from sins and defects.

From the above discourse, it becomes crystal-clear what the good manner of servitude demands: The servant should praise his Lord in exactly the same words the Lord Himself has chosen for Himself; no deviation from it would be tolerable, as the Prophet has said in an universally accepted tradition; “I do not enumerate Thy praise; Thou art as Thou Thyself hast praised Thyself ...”

Therefore, the divine word, “All praise is due to God,” is a sort of a training to the servant—a training without which he could not know how to declare the praise of God.

... *the Lord (Rabb) of the worlds (al-‘ālamīn)*: *al-Rabb* is the Master Who manages the affairs of His servant. The word, thus, connotes the idea of ownership. Ownership (in our social structure) is a special relationship of one thing with another—a relationship that allows the owner to do with the owned thing as he wishes. When we say, “This thing belongs to us,” it shows that it has a special relationship with us that allows us to do with it as we wish; had it not been for this relationship, we would not have had this authority over it. In this social context, it is an idea which the society has laid down but which has no existence outside imagination. This idea is derived from another real and positive concept, which too is called “ownership”: Our limbs and faculties, like the sight, the hearing, the hands and the feet, belong to us—they exist because of our own existence, they have no independent existence, they depend on us for their existence and continuity, and we use them as we like. This is the real ownership.

The ownership that may be attributed to God is the real one, and not that which is based on subjective outlook. Obviously the real ownership cannot be disjoined from management of the affairs of the owned thing. The owned thing depends on the owner in its existence, as well as in all affairs related to its existence. God is *al-Rabb* the Lord of everything because the Lord is the owner who manages the affairs of, and looks after, the owned thing—and only God has this attribute.

al-‘Ālamīn is the plural of *al-‘ālam* (the world) which literally means, “what one is known with.” This paradigm is used for “instrument,” like *al-qālab* (the mold, the form), *al-khātām* (the seal, the instrument of

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sealing), and *al-ṭābaʿ* (the stamp, the impress). The word *al-ʿālam* is used for the universe—the whole creation taken together. Also it is used for each genes or species taken separately, for example, the inorganic world, the vegetable world, the animal world, the human world. It is also used for a class of a species, like the Arab world, the African world and so on. This last meaning is more appropriate in the context of these verses: The verses that enumerate the good names of God until they come to “the Master of the Day of Judgment.” The judgment is reserved for mankind alone or together with the jinn. Therefore, the “worlds” should refer to the worlds of the human beings and the jinn, that is, their various groups. The word *al-ʿālamīn* (the worlds) has been used in this sense in other Qur’anic verses too. God says: ... *and has chosen you above the women of the worlds* (3:42); ... *so that he may be a warner to the worlds* (25:1); *What! do you commit an indecency which anyone in the worlds has not done before you* (7:80).

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣﴾ مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾

(1:3-4) *the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Master (mālik) of the Day of Judgment.*

We have explained above the meaning of ownership, that is, master-ship. The word *al-mālik* is derived from *al-milk* (possession, to possess). Some reciters have read this word as *al-malik* (the sovereign, the king); it is derived from *al-mulk* (country; kingdom). The king is the one who has the authority to manage his nation’s affairs; nevertheless he does not own the nation or the country. In other words, he holds the authority for management and administration.

The reciters have given the reasons for their preference of either recitation. But the fact remains that God is the Master as well as the King, and both words are equally correct, so far as the divine authority is concerned. Looking at it from linguistic point of view, the word, “King” is generally used in context of time and period. It is said, “the King of that time”; but they do not say “the master of that time,” as it would be stretching the meaning too far. In this verse, God has used this word in reference to a certain “day”; therefore, linguistically, it would be more proper to say, “the King of the Day of Judgment.” Moreover, God has used the word, “Kingdom” in context of the same day in other verse: *To whom belongs the kingdom of this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer [of all]* (40:16).

(Praise) From Philosophical Point of View

Reason tells us that an effect, as well as all its characteristics and affairs, depend on its cause; whatever perfection it may be having, is a shadow of the cause. If beauty or goodness has any existence, then its perfect and independent entity is for God only, as He is the Cause of all causes. The praise and thank is addressed, in reality, to the cause which creates the perfection and excellence referred to. As all perfection is caused by God, every praise and thank, in reality, is addressed to God. Therefore, all praise is for, and due to God.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

(1:5) *Thee do we worship (naʿbud) and Thee do we beseech for help.*

al-ʿAbd means slave, a human being who is owned. In its abstract sense, it is applied to other intellectual beings also, as the words of God show: *There is no one in the heavens and the earth but will come to the Beneficent Allah as (ʿabdan) a slave* (19:93). In modern usage, it is commonly translated as ‘servant’.

al-Ibādah (to serve, to worship, to obey) is derived from this word. Its inflexion and meaning changes according to the context. *al-Jawharī* has written in his dictionary, *al-Ṣiḥāh*, that “the basis of *al-ʿubūdiyyah* (bondage, servitude) is *al-khuḍūʿ* (submission). But this explanation is not of the word; it only shows a concomitant quality of its meaning; because *al-khuḍūʿ* is used with the preposition *li*, and *al-ibādah* is used without any preposition. This argument seems inconclusive. If two words are synonymous, it is not necessary for them to have the same preposition. *al-Mawlā* and *al-awlā* have the same meaning—guardian, master; but the former is used without a preposition while the latter is followed by the preposition *bi* (for, with, and so on).

When a servant of God worships Him, he stands before the Lord as a slave stands before his master. That is why worship is diametrically opposed to arrogance and pride—but it is not so opposed to polytheism; after all, a slave may be jointly owned by two or more masters. God says: *Verily those who are arrogant to My worship shall soon enter Hell, disgraced* (40:60). Also He says: *... and he should not join anyone in the worship of his Lord* (18:110). It should be noted here that polytheism—joining someone in the worship of God—is a possibility, and that is why it has been made subject

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of this prohibition; none forbids an impossible thing. But arrogance does not exist with worship, and that is why the expression, “arrogant to my worship,” has been used in the first verse.

Servitude is effective in those affairs which are owned or controlled by the master; and not in other matters related to the slave, like his being son of his father, or having a height of so many centimeters—there is no submission or servitude in such things. But the mastership of God is not limited; His mastership is not shared by anyone else, nor is the servitude of the creatures divided between God and someone else. A master has only limited authority over his servants—he may employ them to perform certain duties, but he cannot kill them or punish them unjustly. But God has total and all encompassing authority over His servants; He does whatsoever He wills with them and about them. His ownership is unconditional and unlimited; and the servitude of His creatures is likewise unconditional and unlimited. This “ownership” is true and exclusive on both sides: The Lord has the exclusive ownership, and the slave has the exclusive servitude. The construction of the sentence, “Thee do we worship,” points to this exclusiveness—the object, “Thee,” has been placed before the verb, and worship is mentioned without any condition.

It has been explained earlier that the owned thing exists and subsists because of, and with, its owner. In this sense, it should not divert an onlooker’s attention from its owner. You look at a house belonging to Zayd; if you are looking at it merely as a house, you may possibly lose sight of Zayd; but if you look at it from the angle that it is a property of Zayd, you cannot wean your thoughts from him.

The only true attribute of the universe is that it is created and owned by God. Nothing in the creation can hide the divine presence, nor should looking at these things make one forgetful of God. He is ever present, as He has said: *Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that he is a witness over all things? Now surely they are in doubt as to the meeting of their Lord; now surely He encompasses all things* (41:53-54). The true worship, therefore, is that in which the worshiped and the worshiper both are present. God should be worshiped as the One who is present before the worshiper—and that is why the third person of the preceding verses has been changed to the second person in this verse, “Thee do we worship.” The worshiper should be present before his Lord, not only with his body but also with his soul; otherwise, the worship would be a body without soul, a form without

life. Nor should he divide his attention between his Lord and someone (or something) else—neither openly, (as the idol worshipers do)—nor secretly (like the one whose mind is on something else while worshipping God, or the one who worships God because he wants to enter the Garden or to save himself from the hell). All these diversions are various facets of polytheism, and God has forbidden it in His Book: ... *therefore, worship Allah, being sincere to Him in religion (39:2). Now, surely, sincere religion is for Allah [alone], and [as for] those who take guardians besides Him, [saying]: We do not worship them save that they may make us nearer to Allah, surely Allah will judge between them in that in which they differ (39:3).*

Worship shall be a true worship when it is done with pure intention, and this purity has been named as the presence of the worshiper. This will happen only when the attention of the worshiper is not fixed on anyone other than God (otherwise, it would be polytheism); and when his aim of worship is not any other hope or fear like that of the paradise or the hell (otherwise, the worship would not be purely for God). Moreover, he should not be concerned with his own self, as it would tantamount to egotism and arrogance, completely opposite of submission and servitude. Probably the plural pronoun—“we” worship—points to this fact; it negates the individuality of the worshiper as he includes himself in a multitude of people; it removes egotism, creates humility, and effaces the tendency of self-importance.

The declaration of one’s servitude with the words, “Thee do we worship,” is free from all defects, so far as its meaning and purity are concerned. Yet, as the servant describes the worship as his own act, it could create an impression that he thought to be independent in existence, power and will, while in fact he is only a slave and slave owns nothing. The second sentence, “and Thee do we beseech for help,” removes this possible misunderstanding. It means: “We ascribe the worship to ourselves and make this claim only with Thy help; we are never independent of Thee. In other words, the complete verse, “Thee do we worship and Thee do we beseech for help,” gives a single meaning, and that is “worship with purity of intention.” Probably, that is why both sentences have the same style; otherwise, it could be said, ‘Thee do we worship; help us and guide us ...’ The style has been changed in the next verse, “guide us ...” and its reason will be explained later.

The above given explanation makes it clear why the pronouns in this

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verse have been changed from the third to the second person; why the restrictive device of putting the object (“Thee”) before the verb has been chosen; why the worship, in “do we worship,” is used without any condition; why worshiper includes others with him in this declaration of allegiance and worship; why the second sentence is needed after the first; and why both have the same construction and style.

The scholars have written other fine points about this verse; the reader is advised to refer to their books for this purpose; God is the creditor whose debt can never be repaid.

Examining Narrations

- (1) Imam al-Riḍā said in explanation of the divine words: *In the name of Allah*: “It means: ‘I mark my soul with one of the marks of God,’ and it is (His) worship.” He was asked: “What is the mark?” He said; “The brand.” (*Uyun al-akhbār* and *Maʿani al-akhbār*)

Author’s comment: This meaning emanates from the explanation given earlier that the preposition, “in,” herein connotes beginning. As the servant marks his worship with the name of God, he brands his soul—real doer of the worship—with one of the divine marks.

- (2) It is narrated in *al-Tahdhīb* from Imam al-Ṣādiq, and in *Uyun al-akhbār* and *al-Tafsīr* of al-ʿAyyāshi from Imam al-Riḍā that this verse “is nearer to the Greatest name of God than the iris of the eye is from its white.”

Author’s comment: This tradition will be explained when we shall talk about the Greatest name.

- (3) Amīr al-muʿminīn said that (this verse) is from the chapter of The Opening; and verily the Messenger of God used to recite it and count it as one of its verses, and he used to say, “The Opening of the Book is ‘the seven oft-repeated’ (verses).” (*Uyun al-akhbār*)

Author’s comment: This matter has also been narrated by the Sunni narrators. al-Dār-qutnī narrates from Abū Hurayrah that he said: “The Messenger of God said: When you recite (the chapter of) The Praise (that is, The Opening), you shall recite, *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*, because it is the source of the Book and (is) the seven oft-repeated (verses), and, *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful* is one of its verses.

- (4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “What have they done? May God destroy them! They proceeded to the greatest verse of the Book of God,

and thought that it would be an innovation (unlawful act) if they recited it loudly!” (*al-Khiṣāl*)

- (5) Imam al-Bāqir said: “They stole the most exalted verse of the Book of God, (that is) In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. It should be recited at the start of every big or small work, so that it may be blessed.

Author’s comment: There are numerous traditions of this meaning coming from the imams of Ahl al-Bayt. All of them prove that the verse (In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful) is a part of every chapter, except the ninth (“Repentance”); and the Sunni traditions also prove it:

- (6) Anas (b. Mālik) said that the Messenger of God said: “Just now a chapter has been sent down to me.” Then he began reciting, “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim).
- (7) Abū Dāwūd narrates from Ibn ‘Abbās (and they say that its chain is “correct”) that he said: “Verily, the Messenger of God did not know the separation of a chapter (and in another narrative it is ‘end of a chapter’) until came down to him: In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.”

Author’s comment: This matter has been narrated by Shia narrators also from Imam al-Bāqir.

- (8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said, among other things, in a tradition: “And God is God of everything, *al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent) for all His creations, *al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) especially for the believers.”¹
- (9) Imam al-Ṣādiq has said: “*al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent) is a special name with a general attribute; and *al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) is a general name with a special attribute.”

Author’s comment: The preceding commentary may explain why the mercy of “the Beneficent” is general for the believer and the unbeliever alike, and why that of “the Merciful” is reserved for the believer only. The description given in this tradition that “the Beneficent is a special name with a general attribute, and the Merciful is a general name with a special attribute,” perhaps this refers to the fact that the mercy of the Beneficent is limited to this world and is common to the whole creation; and that of the Merciful is common to this world and the hereafter but is reserved for the believer. In other words, the mercy of the Beneficent is reserved for

1 Reported in *al-Kāfī*, *al-Tawḥīd*, *Maʿani al-akḥbār* and *al-Tafsīr* of al-ʿAyyāshi.

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the creative blessings that are bestowed on believers and unbelievers alike; and that of the Merciful is common to the creative and legislative blessings (the latter opening the way to happiness and felicity) and is reserved for believers, because only the bounties bestowed upon them will last forever, and the (good) end is for guarding (against evil) and for piety.

- (10) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “A mule of my father was lost. He said: ‘If God brought it back to me, I would thank Him with praises He would be pleased with.’ Shortly afterward, it was brought before him with its saddle and rein (intact). When he sat on it and arrayed his clothes, he raised his head toward heaven and said: ‘Praise be to God.’ He said nothing more. Then he said: ‘I did not omit, nor did I leave out, anything; I have declared that all praises are for God, Powerful and Great is He!; because there is no praise but it is included in this (formula).’” (*Kashf al-ghummah*)
- (11) It is narrated in *‘Uyun al-akhbār* that Imam ‘Alī was asked about its explanation. He said: “Verily, God has explained to His servants broadly some of His bounties on them, as they cannot know all His bounties in detail—they are beyond enumeration and description. Therefore, He said: Say: ‘All praise is for God on what He has bestowed upon us.’”

Author’s comment: The Imam points to the fact mentioned earlier that the praise, in this verse, is from the servant, and that God has revealed it to teach him the manners of servitude and worship.



Verses 6-7

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

(1:6-7) *Guide us (ihdinā) to the straight path (al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm), the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors, not of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray.*

Commentary

The meaning of *al-hidāyah* (guidance, to guide) may easily be understood, if we consider first the significance of the “path.” *al-Ṣirāṭ* (path) is synonymous with *al-ṭarīq* and *al-sabīl*. In these verses, God has commended the path that it is straight and that it is the path taken by those upon whom God has bestowed His bounties and favors. It is this path guidance to which has been asked for. And it is the ultimate goal of the worship: The servant prays to his Lord that his worship, clean from all impurities, be performed in this path.

God has mentioned in His Book that He has laid down a path for man, nay, for all the creation, a path upon which they are proceeding. He says: *O man! surely thou art striving to thy Lord, a hard striving, until thou art to meet Him (84:6); ... and to Him is the ultimate resort (64:3); ... now surely to Allah do all affairs eventually come (42:53).* There are many such verses, showing that all are proceeding on a prescribed road and that their destination is God.

So far as the way is concerned, God has said that there are two ways, not one: *Did I not enjoin on you, O children of Adam! that you should not worship the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should worship Me; this is the straight path (30:60-61).* So, there is a straight path, and also there is another path. Again He has said: *... then verily I am near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way (2:186); Call upon Me, I will answer you. Verily, those who are arrogant*

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to My worship shall soon enter hell, disgraced (40:60). Obviously, God is near to His servants, and the nearer path to Him is that of worship and prayer. Compare it with description of those who do not believe in Him: ... *these shall be called to from a far-off place* (41:44). Obviously, the station of unbelievers is far-off place.

There are thus two ways to God, a near one—the way of the believers—and a distant one, that of the others. It is the first difference between the ways.

Second difference: *Surely [as for] those who reject Our signs and turn away from them haughtily, the doors of heaven shall not be opened for them* (7:40). What is the function of a door? To let authorized people pass through it and bar the entry to unauthorized ones. The verse shows that there is a passage from the lower level to the upper heights. On the other hand, God says: ... *and to whomsoever My wrath descends he shall perish indeed* (20:81). The word translated here as “shall perish” literally means “shall fall down.” Therefore, there is another passage coming for the upper heights to the lower level. Also He says: ... *and whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith, he indeed has gone astray from [that is, has lost] the right way* (2:108). God uses the term “polytheism” for “going astray.” Accordingly, people are divided into three categories: First, those who proceed to the upper heights—those who believe in the signs of God and are not arrogant to His worship. Second, those who fall down to the lower levels—they are those upon whom the wrath of God has descended. Third, those who have gone astray from the right path; they are lost, wandering hither and thither. The last verse under discussion points to these three categories: “the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors, not of those inflicted by Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray.”¹

Obviously, “the straight path” is separate from the last two paths. It is the path of the believers who are not arrogant. At the same time, the following verse shows that the straight path itself may be divided in various “traffic lanes,” ways or branches: ... *Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees ...* (58:11). This statement needs some elaboration:

Every straying is polytheism and vice versa, as may be inferred from the words of God: ... *and whoever adopts unbelief instead of faith, he*

1 As may be seen in the verses 36:60-62, quoted above. (Trans.)

indeed has gone astray from the right way (2:108). The same is the theme of the verse: *Did not I enjoin on you, O children of Adam! that you should not worship the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should worship Me; this is the straight path. And certainly he has led astray a great multitude from among you* (36:60-62). Likewise, the Qur'an counts polytheism as injustice and vice versa, as may be seen in the words which the Satan shall utter after the judgment will be delivered against him and his followers: ... *surely I disbelieved in your associating me with Allah, before; surely it is the unjust that shall have the painful punishment* (14:22). Then it counts injustice as straying: *Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with injustice, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who shall be guided aright* (6:82). It should be noted that they shall be guided aright and shall have security against straying or its resulting punishment only if they do not mix their faith with injustice and inequity.

It is clear from looking at these verses together that going astray, polytheism and inequity all have the same effect; all three are adjunct to each other. That is why it is said that each of them is identifiable by the other two. For all practical purposes the three are one and the same, although they may be different in their literal meaning.

The straight path, then, is different from that of those who have gone astray; it is a path which is far away from polytheism and injustice. There can be no straying in this path—neither in hidden ideas and beliefs (for example, the disbelief or the thoughts disapproved by God); nor in open actions or omissions (like committing a sin or omitting a good deed). It is the true monotheism in belief and in deeds. And what is there after the truth but error? The above mentioned verse 6:82, fits on it completely. That verse guarantees security in the way and promises perfect guidance. The promise is inferred from the fact that the original word translated as “guided aright” is noun-agent, and the grammarians say that such a noun is really made for future. This is one feature of the straight path.

God has identified those bestowed with divine favors, in the verse: *And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous ones; and excellent are these as companions* (4:69). The belief and the obedience have been explained shortly before it in these words: *But no! by your Lord! they do not believe [in reality] until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement*

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among them, and then they do not find any straitness in their selves as to what you have decided, and submit with total submission. And if We had prescribed for them: Kill yourselves or go forth from your homes, they would not have done it except a few of them; and if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and most efficacious in strengthening [them] (4:65-66). Those who truly believe are really strong in their servitude and submission, in words and in deeds; in appearance and in secret. Yet such perfect believers shall be placed in a rank behind those upon whom God has bestowed favors; that is why God has said, “these are with those ...” and not, among those. They shall be with them, but not of them. It is further strengthened by the last sentence, “and excellent are these as companions.” Companions are other than the self.

There is another, somewhat similar, verse in fifty seventh chapter: *and [as for] those who believe in Allah and His messengers, these it is that are the truthful and the martyrs with their Lord; they shall have their reward and their light ... (57:19).* The believers, thus, shall be included in the ranks of the martyrs and the truthful—in the life hereafter. The fact that it will happen in the next world is inferred from the words, “with their Lord,” and “they shall have their reward.”

Those bestowed with divine favors who are the people of the straight path—with whose relationship the straight path is identified—have greater prestige and higher rank than these believers who have cleansed their beliefs and actions from straying, polytheism and injustice. Pondering on these verses together, one feels sure that this group of the believers (with this quality) still continues; it has not come to its end. Had this group completed its term, it would have been counted among (and not, “with”) those bestowed with favors; these believers would have gone up and instead of being with those bestowed with favors, would have become part of them. They probably are among those who have been given knowledge from God, as He says: *Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees (58:11).*

The people of the straight path are bestowed with excellent bounties that are more precious than that of the complete faith and perfect belief. This is the second feature of the straight path.

God repeatedly mentions *al-ṣirāt* (path) and *al-sabīl* (way) in the Qur'an; but He has never attributed to Himself except one straight path; although He attributes several ways to Himself. *And [as for] those who*

strive hard for Us. We will most certainly guide them onto Our ways (29:69).

Likewise, He has never ascribed “the straight path” to any of his servants, the only exception being this verse under discussion which ascribes it to those who are bestowed with divine favors; but He frequently attributes “the way” to one or the other of His chosen servants: *Say: This is my way; I invite you unto Allah; with clear sight [are] I and he who follows me (12:108); ... and follow the way of him who turns to Me (31:15); ... the way of the believers ... (4:115).* It is an indication that “the way” is other than “the straight path.” There may be various and different ways taken by various chosen servants proceeding on the way of worship and submission; but “the straight path” is only one, as God points to it in these words: *Indeed, there has come to you a light and a clear Book from Allah; with it Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety and brings them out of utter darkness into light by His permission and guides them to the straight path (5:15-16).* See, how the verse refers to “the ways” (in plural), and to “the straight path” (in singular). Now, there may be two explanations for it. Either “the straight path” is the same thing as “the ways,” or “the ways” on going further join together and then merge into the straight path.

There is another difference between the straight path and the way. God says: *And most of them do not believe in Allah without associating others [with Him] (12:106).* Note how the believers are said to associate others with God. It shows that some sort of polytheism (that is, straying) may coexist with belief (and the belief is a “way”); in other words the way may coexist with polytheism. But the straight path cannot do so because it is not the path of those who have gone astray.

Each of these ways has some excellence or some deficiency—but not so the straight path. Each way is a part of the straight path, but is distinguished from the other ways. It may be inferred from the above mentioned verses as well as from others. For example, God says: *And that you worship Me; this is the straight path (36:61); Say: Surely, [as for] me, my Lord has guided me to the straight path; [to] a most right religion, the faith of Abraham the upright one (6:161).* The worship and the religion are common to all the ways, and they are also “the straight path.” The relation of the straight path to the ways of God is that of the soul to the body. The body, during the life, undergoes countless changes, varies from day to day—from infancy to childhood; from adolescence to youth, from middle to old age

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and to senility. But the soul remains the same, and is always one with body at every stage. Sometimes, the body is inflicted with undesirable effects, which the soul would never accept, if left to itself. But the soul—the creation of God, upon which He created the man—never deteriorates. Yet, in all these states, the body remains one with the soul. Likewise, the ways of God are one with the straight path; but sometimes a way—the way of the believers, of the followers of the Prophet of those who turn toward God or any other way—suffers from some kind of deterioration, although the straight path is immune from all defects and imperfections. You have seen how one of the ways, the belief, sometimes combines with polytheism and straying, but the straight path does not do so. In short, the ways are of various grades—near or distant; safe or unsafe; clean or unclean—but all are in the straight path, or, let us say, are one with the straight path.

God has mentioned this fact, in a parable of truth and falsehood, in these words: *He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam; and from what they melt in the fire for the sake of [making] ornaments or apparatus arises a scum like it; thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood; then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which profits the people, it remains in the earth; thus does Allah set forth parables (13:17).* It clearly shows that the hearts and mind differ in their abilities and capacities to receive the divine knowledge and spiritual perfection, although all partake of the same divine sustenance. (Its full explanation will be written under the Ch. 13).

This was, however, the third feature of the straight path.

From the above analysis it may be seen that the straight path is a sort of controller of all the ways leading to God. We may say that a way leading to God leads a man to Him as long as it remains one with the straight path; but the straight path leads to God unconditionally, without any if or but. That is why God has named it *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path). *al-Ṣirāṭ* means a clear path, and is derived from *saraṭṭtu sarṭan* (I swallowed it completely); in other words, this clear path swallows its walkers without letting them go out. *al-Mustaqīm* (straight) literally means the one who stands on his legs, and has full control of himself as well as of the things attached to him. In other words, it is a thing which is not subjected to change or variation. Thus *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path) is the path which never fails to guide and to lead the walker to his

destination. God says: *Then as for those who believe in Allah and hold fast unto Him, soon will He admit them to Mercy from Him and [His] Grace, and guide them unto Himself [by] the straight path (4:175).* Obviously this guidance does not fail; it always succeeds. Also He has said: *Therefore [for] whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam, and [for] whomsoever He intends that He should leave him to err, He makes his breast strait and narrow as though he were ascending into the sky; thus does Allah lay uncleanness on those who do not believe. And this is the path of your Lord, [a] straight [path] (6:125-126).* That is, this is God's path that never changes, nor does it fail to reach its destination. Again He says: *He said: This is a straight path with Me; surely as regards My servants, thou hast no authority over them except those who follow thee of the deviators (15:41-42).* The verse declares that this is His settled course which never varies. In this way, it conveys the same idea which is contained in the verse: *For you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah (35:43).*

The above mentioned discourse has made the following points clear:

First: There are various ways to God, each differing with others in perfection, easiness and smoothness. It all depends on its nearness or remoteness from the basic reality, from the straight path, like the way of submission, of faith, of worship, of purity of intention or of humility before God. Some of the ways leading to the opposite direction are disbelief, polytheism, infidelity, exceeding the bounds, committing sins and so on. God has said: *And for all are grades according to what they did, and so that He may pay them back fully their deeds and they shall not be dealt with unjustly (46:19).*

The same is the case with the spiritual knowledge which the human mind receives from God. They vary according to mental and spiritual capacity of the receivers, and are tinted by colors of visions of the beholders. This fact is shown in the Qur'anic parable mentioned earlier: *He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure ... (13:17).*

Second: The straight path controls all the ways. Likewise, the people of the straight path (who have been firmly established in it by God) do enjoy complete authority to guide the other servants of God. God says: *... and excellent are these as companions (4:69); Verily, your only Master is Allah and His Messenger and those who believe, those who keep up prayer and pay*

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charity (zakāt) while they are bowing down (5:55). The last mentioned verse was revealed about Imam ʿAlī, the Leader of the faithful, as *al-mutawātir* traditions say; and he (peace be on him) was the first to open this door in Islam. More details of it will be given in the fifth chapter.

Third: The import of the guidance to the way depends on the meaning of the way itself. *al-Hidāyah* means to guide, to lead; it accepts two objects, either without any preposition (as in the language of Ḥijāz) or with *ilā* (to) before the second object (as in the language of other tribes). This detail has been given in *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* of al-Jawharī, and obviously it is correct.

Before going further, a mistaken notion should be removed. Some people think that the meaning of guidance changes, depending on whether its second object is preceded by the preposition *ilā* or not. If there is no such preposition, then according to them, guidance means “to convey to the destination”; if it is preceded by then it denotes “to show the path.” In evidence, they offer the following verses: *Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases (28:56).* This verse, in which the verbs, “cannot guide” and “guides,” have been used without preposition, says that the Prophet could not guide whom he pleased. But it is known that he, throughout his life, guided the people, that is, and showed them the path of God. Therefore, what has been negated must be the other meaning. What the verse, then, says is this: you cannot convey to the spiritual goal whom you please; but it is God who conveys to that destination whom He pleases. This difference in meaning is more clearly seen in the verses: *And We would certainly have guided them in the right path (4:68).* The verb (in the Arabic text) has been used without any preposition and it refers to the divine guidance—that is, conveyance to destination. And God addresses the Prophet in these words: *and most surely you guide to the right path (42:52).* Here the verb is followed by *ilā* and the sentence attributes to the Prophet the task of guidance, in the meaning of showing the way. According to their reasoning the three verses put together show that when guidance is used in the meaning of “conveying to destination,” its second object accepts no preposition; when it is used for “showing the path,” the said object is preceded by *ilā*.

But this notion is not supported by the Qurʾan. God quotes the believer of the people of Pharaoh as saying: *O my people! follow me, I will guide you to the right course (40:38).* Here the Arabic text has no preposition and yet it does not mean conveying to destination, it only denotes showing the way.

What has been mentioned in the verse 28:56 (*Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases*) is the reality or perfection of guidance. The verse shows that the Prophet could not bestow on his people the perfect guidance, the reality of guidance, as it was a task that God has reserved for Himself.

In short, the meaning of guidance does not depend on preposition *ilā* coming or not coming before the second object. In both cases the meaning is the same.

al-Hidāyah means to guide, to show the destination by showing the way, or, let us say, to convey to the destination. Guidance, in reality, is reserved for God, and He guides His servants by creating such causes that point the destination to them and lead them to their spiritual goal. God says: *Therefore [for] whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam (6:125); ... then their skins and their hearts become pliant to the remembrance of Allah; this is Allah's guidance, He guides with it whom He pleases (39:23)*. The verb “become pliant” is followed by the preposition “to,” giving the verb a shade of meaning of inclination and repose. Guidance, thus, means that God creates in the heart an aptitude by which it initiates, accepts, inclines toward and becomes serene in the remembrance of God.

It has been mentioned earlier that there are many ways leading to God. Consequently, guidance for one way would differ from those of the others. Each way has a special guidance of its own. This variation has been hinted at in the verse: *And [as for] those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them unto Our ways; and Allah is most surely with the doers of good (29:69)*. A man strives “in the way of God”; and another strives “for God.” There is a great difference between the two. The first tries to keep the way safe and free from all dangers and blockades; the second’s attention is fixed on God only. It is this man who is praised in this verse—he strives hard for God; thereupon God helps him and guides him on the way most suited to his ability and power; and thereafter keeps guiding him from one way to another until He exclusively attaches him to Himself.

Fourth: The straight path is preserved in the ways of God—the ways that are of various grades and levels. God guides man to it; and the man is thus guided aright. As mentioned above, God may keep guiding a man from one way to the other which is of a higher grade, and then to a third one still higher. The prayer in this verse, “Guide us to the straight path”

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(revealed on behalf of those whom God has already guided to His worship) points to this very fact. If we keep this point in view, there would be no room for an objection like the following: The one who utters this prayer is already guided aright—how can he pray afresh for guidance? It would be an attempt to re-obtain a thing which is already in hand, and it is just impossible. Also, the worshiper is already on the straight path—how can he pray to be guided again to the same path? Isn't it an impossibility?

But the explanation given by us clears away the mist of such objections.

Another objection: Our Law is the most perfect and most comprehensive of all the laws sent by God since the dawn of humanity. Why should we ask from God to guide us to the path of those of the previous people upon whom He had bestowed favors?

Reply: Admittedly, the Law brought by Muḥammad is more perfect than any other one. But it does not necessarily mean that all those who follow this Law are more perfect than all those who followed the previous laws. An average follower of the Law of Muḥammad cannot surpass Noah or Abraham, although their laws were sent long before the Islamic Law. It is one thing to accept and follow a law; it is quite another to get spiritual perfection by total submission—by perfectly molding oneself in that law's pattern. A believer of previous nations who attained a high spiritual level, who became a mirror of divine attributes, is most certainly better than, and superior to, a follower of this law who did not reach that state—even though the latter would be following the most perfect and comprehensive law, that is, the Law of Muḥammad. Therefore, it is quite in order for a believer of lower grade (although he may follow a perfect law) to pray to God to help him reach the level of a believer of higher grade (although he might have followed a less perfect law).

An exegete has replied to the above mentioned objection in a way that is not free from defects. He has said: The religion of God is one, and that is Islam. The fundamental truths—the belief in One God, the prophethood and the Day of Judgment and all that results from this belief—are the same in all the laws and revelations sent by God. The Law of Islam has an added distinction, in that it covers all aspects of human life and is, thus, the most comprehensive one. It looks more properly after public welfare. Moreover, its foundation is laid on reasoning—in all its forms: The logic, the admonition and the goodly argumentation. All divine religions are, thus, the same and the fundamental truths are common to all.

The previous people have preceded us in this path. Therefore, God has ordered us to look into their affairs, to take lessons from them and to follow them to spiritual perfection.

Author's comment: The principle upon which this reply is based is against the principles that guide us in exegesis of the Qur'an. The reply assumes that the realities of fundamental truths are on the same level in all the religions; that there is no difference in their grades; that the spiritual perfections and religious virtues are of the same quality everywhere. According to this view, the highest ranking prophet is equal to the lowest type of believer in his existence and natural perfection—so far as his creation is concerned. The difference, if any, is based on the subjective outlook of shariah, not on any matter of creation. In their opinion, this case is similar to that of a king *vis-à-vis* his subjects—they are not different in their human existence, the difference is in their subjective and assumed positions only which are laid down by people and which do not have any independent existence.

This thinking, in its turn, is based on the theory of materialism, which teaches that nothing exists but matter; metaphysical “things” have no existence at all (or, at least, we are not in a position to know that they exist). The only exception is God, and we believe in His existence because of logical evidence.

Those who accepted this view did so because, coming under the influence of natural sciences, they put all their confidence in their five senses. Or because they thought that “commonsense” was enough for explaining the divine words, and therefore, neglected to meditate on the Qur'an.

God willing, we shall throw more light on this subject at some other place.

Fifth: The people of the straight path are higher in rank than others, and their path is superior to the others' ways. It is because of their knowledge, and not because of their virtuous deeds. They have that knowledge of divine attributes which is hidden from others. (We have explained earlier that perfection of virtuous deeds is found in some of the inferior ways also. Therefore, deeds cannot be the criterion by which the people of the straight path are given excellence over the rest.) The question arises as to what is that knowledge and how it is acquired. We shall deal with these questions when we shall explain the verse 13:17 (*He sends down water from the heaven, then the valleys flow according to their measure*).

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The following verses too point to this fact: *Allah will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge in higher degrees* (58:11); *To Him do ascend the good words; and the good deed lifts them up* (35:10). What ascends to God is the good words, that is, true belief and knowledge; good deeds lift up the good words and help them in their ascension, without themselves going up. We shall fully discuss this verse when we shall reach it.

Examining Narrations

- (1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said about the meaning of worship: “Worship is of three kinds: some people worship God, because they fear Him—so it is the worship of slaves; and a group worships God, Blessed and High is He, to seek reward—so it is the worship of hirelings; and a group worships God, Mighty and Great is He, because of (His) love—and this is the worship of noble persons, and it is the most excellent worship.” (*al-Kāfi*)
- (2) Verily, some people worshiped God being desirous (of His reward)—so this is the worship of traders; and some people worshiped God fearing (His punishment)—so it is the worship of slaves, and a group worshiped God in gratitude (to Him)—so this is the worship of noble men. (*Nahj al-balāghah*)
- (3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “Verily people worship God in three ways: One group worships Him in desire of His reward, and it is the worship of covetous ones, and it is greed; and others worship Him in dread of the Fire, and it is the worship of slaves, and it is fear; but I worship Him in His love—Mighty and Great is He—and this is the worship of noble ones. (It is) because God has said: *and they shall be secure from terror on that days* (27:89); and He has said, *Say: If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you ...* (3:31) . Therefore, whosoever is loved by God, he shall be among the secure ones; and it is a hidden position, cannot touch it save the purified ones.” (*al-ʿilal*, *al-Majālis* and *al-Khiṣāl*)

Author’s comment: The meaning of these traditions may be understood from the preceding commentary. The imams (of Ahl al-Bayt) have variously attributed the worship of the noble ones sometimes to gratitude and sometimes to love, because in final analysis both are one and the same. Gratitude and thank means putting the received bounty in its proper place. It is the thanking of worship that it should be addressed to God, as only

He, Himself, deserves to be worshiped. God is worshiped because He is God, that is, because He alone holds all attributes of beauty and glory. He, of all things, is Beautiful; He alone is loved for Himself. What is love? It is inclination and attraction toward beauty. We say: He is worshiped because He is He; We may express the same idea if we say: He is worshiped because He is beautiful and beloved. Again, the same theme may be explained by saying that He is worshiped because He is the Bestower of favors and is thanked through worship. All three expressions carry the same import.

- (4) It has been narrated through Sunni chains that Imam al-Ṣādiq explained the verse, “Thee do we worship ...” in these words: “We do not ask from Thee other than Thee, and we do not worship Thee by substitute and replacement, as do those who are ignorant of Thee, removed from Thee.”

Author’s comment: This tradition points to what has been explained in the commentary that worship demands presence (of heart) and purity (of intention) which does not allow diversion to any substitute, to anything else.

- (5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said, among other things, in a tradition: “And whosoever thinks that he worships (God) by (His) attributes without being conscious of Him, he refers (his worship) to an absent one; and whosoever thinks that he worships the attribute and the person (having that attribute) he nullifies monotheism, because the attribute is other than the person; and whosoever thinks that he ascribes the person to the attribute, he belittles the Great One, ‘and they do not assign to God His proper prestige ...’ ” (*Tuhaf al-ʿuqul*)
- (6) Imam al-Ṣādiq explained the verse: *Guide us to the straight path*, in these words: “Guide us to adhere to the path that leads to Thy love, and conveys to Thy Garden, (the path that) prevents us from following our desires (lest we be ruined) and from adhering to our opinions (lest we be destroyed). (*Maʿāni al-akhbār*)
- (7) The same book (*Maʿāni al-akhbār*) quotes Imam ʿAlī as saying about this verse: “Continue for us Thy help with which we obeyed Thee in our past days, so that we continue to obey Thee in our coming days also.”

Author’s comment: The two traditions point to two aspects of the reply of the previously mentioned objection—that the prayer for guidance,

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addressed by a person already guided aright, is trying to obtain a thing in hand, and that it was asking for impossible. The first tradition looks at the difference in the grades of guidance, and the second looks at oneness of guidance in its reality.

- (8) Again *Maʿani al-akhbār* quotes Imam ʿAlī as saying: “The straight path, in this world, is that which stops short of excesses and rises above shortcomings, and remains straight; and, in the next world, it is the path of the believers (leading them) to the Garden.”
- (9) The same book quotes the same Imam, explaining the verse: *The path of those ...* as follows: “Say: Guide us to the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors by strengthening them for Thy religion and Thy obedience—not (of those whom Thou favored) with wealth and health because such things are sometimes given even to the disbelievers or to the sinful.” (Then he said:) “And those (bestowed with divine favor) are those about whom God says: *And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous ones, and excellent are these as companions* (4:69).”
- (10) Imam al-Riḍā narrates through his forefathers from Amīr al-muʾminīn [Imam ʿAlī] that he said: “I heard the Messenger of God saying: God, Mighty and Great is He, has said: “I have divided the Opening of the Book between Myself and My servant; so, its half is for Me and the (other) half is for My servant. And My servant shall get what he asks for.” When the servant says: In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, God, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant has started with My name, and it is incumbent upon Me that I should complete his works for him and bless him in his affairs.” And when he says: All praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds, God, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant has praised Me, and he knows that the bounties that are with him are from Me, and that the misfortunes that have been averted from him were so averted by My grace; (O My angels!) I appoint you as My witnesses that I shall add for him the favors of the next world to those of this world, and will avert from him the calamities of the next world as I have averted from him the calamities of this world.” And when he says, The Beneficent, the

Merciful, God, Great is His Glory, says: “My servant bore witness for Me that I am the Beneficent, the Merciful; I make you My witness that I will most surely augment his share in My mercy, and I will most certainly increase his portion in My bounties.” And when he says, The Master of the Day of Judgment, God, the High, says: “I make you My witness that, as he has acknowledged that I am the Master of the Day of Judgment, I will most certainly make his reckoning easier (for him) on the Day of Reckoning, and I will most certainly accept his good deeds, and look over his sins.” And when he says: Thee do we worship, God, Mighty and Great is He, says: “My servant is telling truth, He worships Me only. Be My witness that I will most surely give him for his worship a reward that will be the (object of) envy to all who opposed him when he worshiped Me.” And when he says, and Thee do we beseech for help, God, the High, says: “From Me has My servant sought help, and in Me has he taken refuge. Be My witness that I will most certainly help him in his affairs, and will aid him in his difficulties, and will take his hand in his calamities.” And when he says, Guide us to the right path ... God, Mighty and Great is He, says: “This (part) is for My servant, and My servant shall have what he asks for; and I have answered (the prayer of) My servant, and have given him what he hopes for and have protected him from what he is afraid of.” ’ ’ ’ (*Uyūn al-akhbār*).

Author’s comment: al-Ṣadūq has narrated in *ʿIlālu al-sharāʿi*, an almost similar tradition from Imam al-Riḍā. The tradition explains the chapter of The Opening in the frame of the daily prayer. It further confirms the previously mentioned fact that this divine revelation has been sent, as though on behalf of the servants of God, to teach them the manners of servitude; to show them how to praise their Lord and how to declare their allegiance to Him. It is a chapter made especially for the purpose of worship; and no other chapter comes near to it in this respect. For example:

- (a) The entire chapter is a divine speech, revealed on behalf of His servant, so that he may recite it when he stands to worship his Lord.
- (b) It is divided in two parts: one for God and the other for the servant.
- (c) It contains, in spite of its brevity, all the Qur’anic wisdom.

The Qur’an is a vast treasure of fundamental truths, moral values and the most comprehensive shariah which consists of the rules of worship

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and mutual dealings, as well as the penal and civil codes. Further it is a valuable mine of divine promises and threats, stories of previous peoples as well as parables and moral lessons. But, in spite of this wide scope, all its teachings may be returned to four fundamental truths: the Oneness of God, the prophethood, the resurrection (with all its details) and the guidance of mankind to its bliss in this world as well as in the next. Needless to reiterate that this chapter contains all these basic realities in these very short, and at the same time very eloquent, sentence.

It will not be out of place to compare the beauty, glory and spirituality of this chapter, used in the Muslims' prayers, with the Lord's prayer, used by the Christians in their prayer:

Our Father which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen. (Matthews 6:9-13)

Ponder deeply on the teachings contained in these sentences, supposed to be of divine revelation, and see what manners of servitude does this prayer teach. First it tells them that their Father (that is God, in their terminology) is in heaven. Then it prays about the Father that His name be hallowed, His kingdom come and His will be done in earth as it is in heaven. The question is: Who will fulfill these wishes which look more like political slogans than spiritual invocation. Then it makes them ask for their daily bread, and for His forgiveness in lieu of their forgiveness—that He should waive His rights as they have waived theirs. But what right do they possess except that which they have been given by God Himself? Then they beseech Him not to lead them into temptation but to deliver them from evil. This is asking for impossible, because this world is the place appointed for our test and trial, so that we may acquire spiritual perfection. Would not salvation lose its meaning, if there was no test and trial?

And yet some orientalists have temerity to write: "Islam does not have any superiority over other religions, so far as spiritual knowledge is concerned, because all divine religions invite the men to the belief in one

God, and ask them to purify themselves by good character and virtuous deeds. The religions excel one another only in their social fruits being deeply rooted.”

Other Narrations

- (1) It is narrated in *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faḳīh* and *al-Tafsīr* of al-ʿAyyāshī that Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “The straight path is *Amīr al-muʿminīn*.”
- (2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “(The straight path) is the path to the knowledge of God. And there are two paths, one in this world and the other in the next. As for the path in this world, it is the imam whose obedience is obligatory; whosoever knows him in this world and follows his guidance, he shall proceed on the path which is the bridge over the hell in the next world; and whosoever does not know him in this world, his foot shall slip (over that bridge) in the next world, and he shall fall down into the fire of the hell.” (*Maʿani al-akhbār*)
- (3) The same book quotes Imam al-Sajjād as saying: “There is no curtain between God and His proof, nor is there any screen for God against His proof. We are the gates of God, and we are the straight path, and we are the (treasure) chest of His Knowledge, and we are the interpreters of His revelation, and we are the pillars of His Oneness, and we are the place of His secret.”
- (4) Ibn Shahrāshūb has quoted from *al-Tafsīr* of Wakīʾ b. al-Jarrāh from ath-Thawri from al-Suddī from Asbāṭ and Mujāhid from Ibn ʿAbbās that he said about the verse: Guide us to the straight path: “Say O group of the servants (of God): Lead us to the love of Muḥammad and his family-members.”

Author’s comment: There are other traditions of the same meaning. Such traditions are based on the “flow” of the Qur’an, that is, application of the Qur’an wherever it is applicable. It should be noted that the term, “flow”—and it will often be used in this book—has been taken from the traditions of the imams of Ahl al-Bayt:

- (5) Al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār said: “I asked Abū Jaʿfar about the tradition, ‘There is no verse in the Qur’an but it has an exterior and an interior, and there is no word in it but it has a boundary, and every boundary has a watching place.’ (I asked him) what was the meaning of exterior and interior. The Imam said: ‘Its exterior is

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its revelation and its interior is its interpretation; some of it has already passed (that is happened) and some of it has not come about yet; it runs along (or flows) as run the sun and the moon; when a thing of it comes (to its appointed place and time) it happens ... (*al-Tafsīr*, of al-^ʿAyyāshi)

Author's comment: This theme is found in other traditions too. It is the convention of the imams of Ahl al-Bayt that they apply a Qur'anic verse to all things it may be applied to. And this convention was correct and reasonable, because the Qur'an was revealed as a "guidance to the worlds"; it guides the mankind to correct belief, correct ethics and correct action. The matter of belief that it has explained is eternal truth; it is not limited to a certain time or certain place. The virtue or vice and the rules laid down for them are not confined to one person or one period—they are general and applicable to all relevant persons and times. The traditions explaining the background of revelation of a certain verse—when, why and about whom or what was it revealed—do not affect its general import. The rule is not restricted to that particular person or event; otherwise, it would cease to be valid in other similar conditions, and would die with the death of that person. The Qur'anic declaration is general. If it praises some persons, or condemns some others, it is because of the presence of good or evil characteristics in them. And wherever those good or evil characteristics are found, even in latter generations, the verse will in all truth be applied to them. The Qur'an itself proves it, as God says: *With it* (that is, the Qur'an) *Allah guides him who follows His pleasure into the ways of safety ...* (5:16); *... and most surely it is a Mighty Book, falsehood shall not come to it from before it nor from behind it* (41:41-42); *Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian* (15:9).

There are numerous traditions, perhaps reaching to hundreds, which apply various verses of the Qur'an to the imams or to their enemies. They are called the traditions of "flow." But now that the general principle has been explained, we shall not include those traditions in this book—except where it becomes necessary for the explanation of a verse or for some reasoning or discussion.

